

Frieze London | ShanghART Booth A13 | 05-08, Oct. 2017

梁绍基 LIANG SHAOJI

Solo Presentation

ShanghART
香格纳画廊

梁绍基

Liang Shaoji

b. 1945, now lives and works in Tiantai, Zhejiang

Liang Shaoji (72-year-old) is one of the most unique and singular figures in the contemporary art scene in China. For 28 years, he has been working with his unusual partners - silkworms. Dubbed as a hermit residing in Tiantai (four-hour driving distance from Shanghai), Liang Shaoji patiently and purely devotes to art by his idiosyncratic creations imbued with ecological aesthetics. He discovers some kind of critical point where science and nature, biology and bio-ecology, weaving and sculpture, installation and performance might meet. His *Nature Series* sees the life process of silkworms as creation medium, the interaction in natural world as his artistic language, time and life as the essential idea. His works are fulfilled with a sense of meditation, philosophy and poetry while illustrating the inherent beauty of silk.

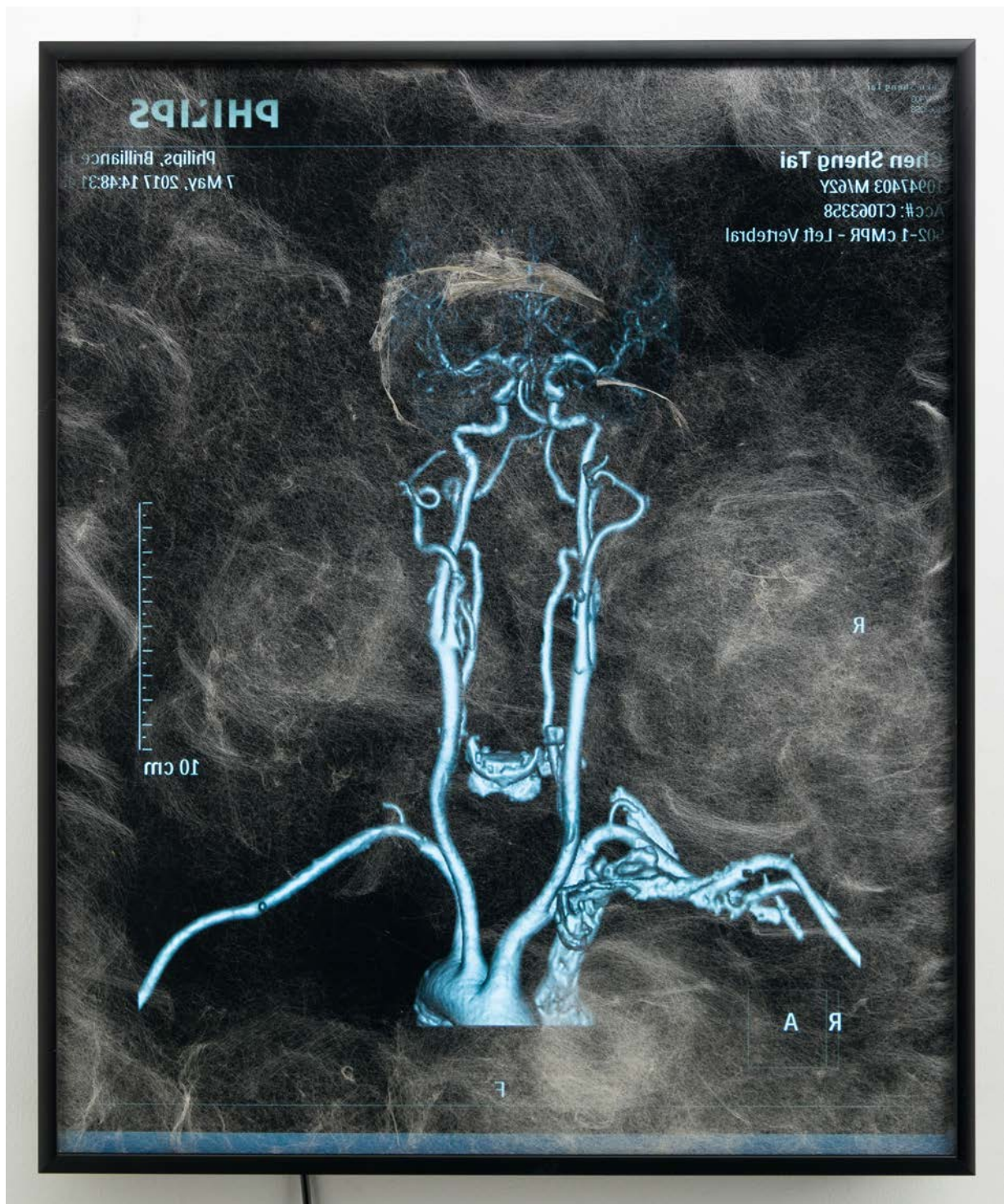
Liang Shaoji's works have been internationally presented at: Cloud Above Cloud, Museum of China Academy of Art, Hangzhou (2016); What About the Art? Contemporary Art from China, Al Riwaq, Doha (2016); Liang Shaoji: Back to Origin, ShanghART Gallery, Shanghai (2014); Liang Shaoji: Questioning Heaven, Gao Magee Art Gallery, Madrid (2012); Art of Change, Hayward Gallery, London (2012); Liang Shaoji, Prince Claus Fund, Amsterdam (2009); Liang Shaoji: An Infinitely Fine Line, Zendai MOMA, Shanghai (2009); Liang Shaoji: Cloud, ShanghART H-Space, Shanghai (2007); The 5th Biennale d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, Lyon (2005); The 6th International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey (1999); The 48th Venice Biennale, Venice (1999); China/Avant-Garde Art Exhibition, National Art Museum of China, Beijing (1989) etc. He was awarded the Chinese Contemporary Art Awards (CCAA) in 2002 and the Prince Claus Awards in 2009.

Tree of Life, 2017

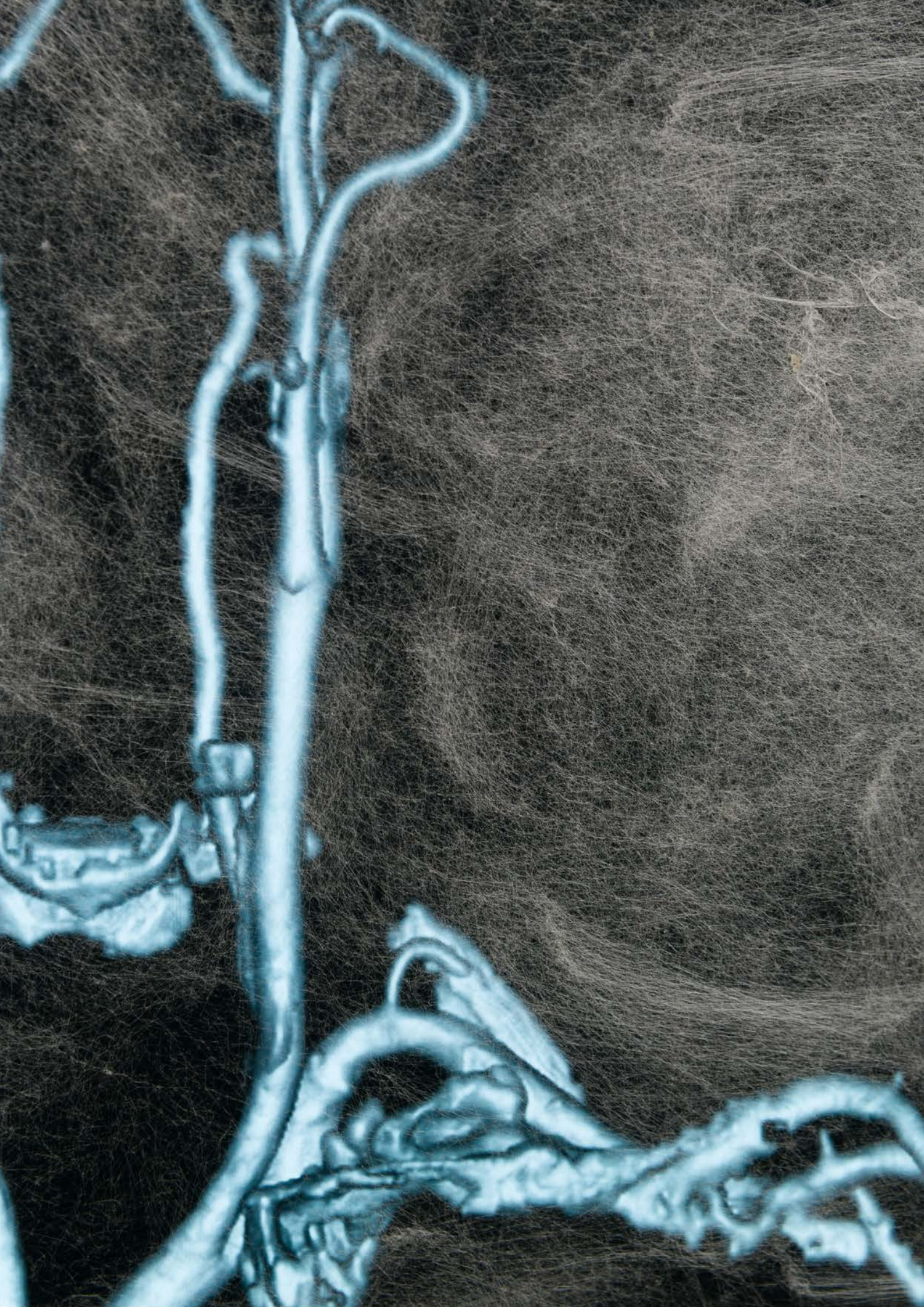
Breathe, 2017

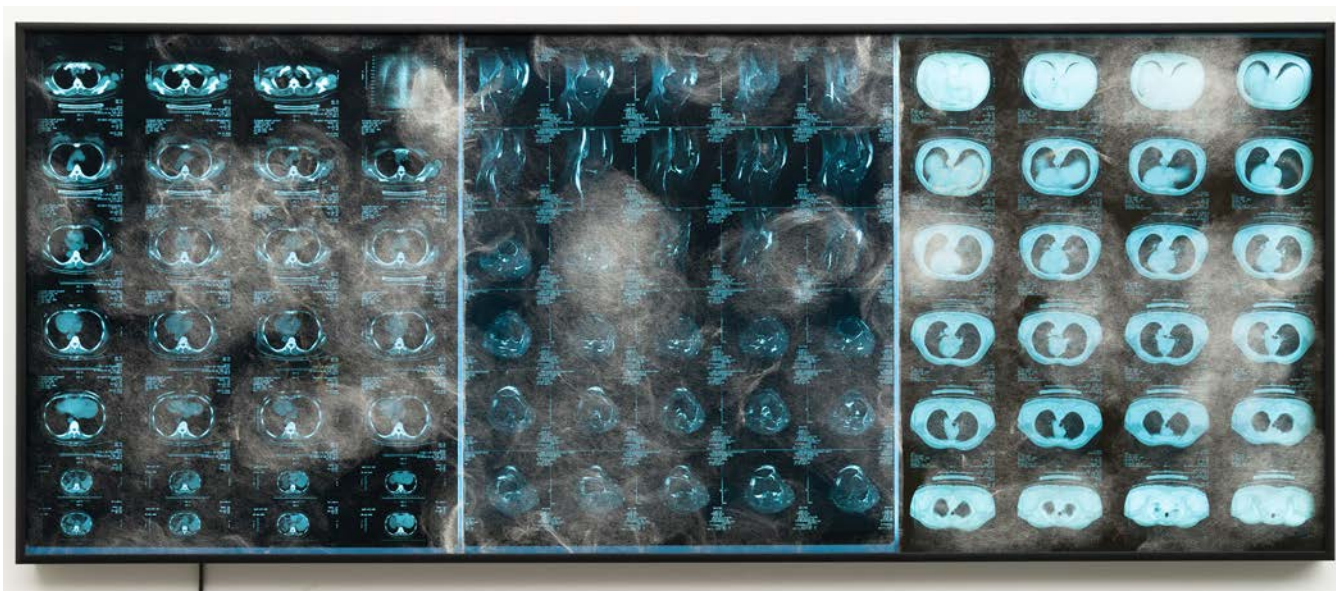
Liang Shaoji composes a poetic "physical text" with silk and X-rays from his friends. The 3D film of a carotid artery in *Tree of Life* resembles a lively tree crown which elegantly depicts the permanent life circumstance. In *Breathe*, cross sections of bones and organs beautifully overlap with the cloud-like traces left by silkworms as if they are breathing, or floating.

X-rays become Liang's recent fascination. Instead of medical result indicated in the X-rays, Liang is more into presenting the breathing of life with silk thread by strengthening the scientific form. X-rays covered with silk depicts Liang's ideas of integrating the imperceptible of eastern philosophy and the attribution of being rational of western medicine. "Observe and explore science with an artistic view, appreciating art with a perspective of life." (Liang)



Tree of Life, 2017
Lightbox, silk, X-ray
44x36x4cm|X-ray 42x35cm, LSJ_9476





Breathe, 2017
Lightbox, silk, X-ray
44x106x4cm|Each X-ray 42x35cm (x 3 pieces), LSJ_1581

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Snow in the Woods, 2016

Liang Shaoji chooses silk and willow branches to build up a snow field where ruins reside. Through silkworms' world, Liang finds out the rustle in the air, recognisable landscape covered with snow, modern skyscrapers and elevated highway, and shapes that are hard to describe. *Snow in the Woods* refer to archeological sites of the past, the current and the future, fluctuating in space and time. The irregular shape is what snow may leave when melted.



Snow in the Woods, 2016

Willow branches, silk, porcelain, cocoons, burned keyboard, wooden board
34x244x122cm, LSJ_1575





Snow in the Woods, 2016

Willow branches, silk, burned keyboard, cocoons, wooden board
31x244x122cm, LSJ_2141



Nature Series No.25, 1999

This old video work depicts Liang Shaoji walking barefoot on metal shavings begrimed with engine oil, dirt and silk. It is full of courage, hesitation, fear, blood, pain and choices, which ends with a scene that moths flapping wings out of cocoons on the shavings. In 1992, Liang started to research and experiment if soft skinned and vulnerable silkworms would spin on sharp and deadly metal shavings and how. And seven years later, he was eager to know what silkworms might feel if it was metal shavings they were spinning on. He made a video of his way to the answer. He got a full truckload of shavings and spread them all over the factory's courtyard. The factory workers became Liang's audience for this solitary and brutal performance.

"I didn't expect it to be that painful. The smaller the shavings were, the worse the pain were. There was no way out, no way to escape from the pain except walk forward to the end of courtyard. I had to go to hospital afterwards. It was the moment that I felt like any human being in distress had no way to give up or to get out of the situation he/she was in. He/she had to move forward fearless."(Liang)



Nature Series No.25, 1999
Single-channel video, 5 minutes 36 seconds
Edition of 8, LSJU029

Chains: The Unbearable Lightness of Being **Nature Series No.79, 2003-2007**

"A silkworm was falling from the roof. All of a sudden, it climbed back through the silk spun by itself. It finally survived. I was going to save this moment with my camera, but it didn't work out." Liang Shaoji represents the moment through jointed chains covered with silk suspended from the ceiling. Inspired by Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Liang delivers his subject matter of a serious nature and a sense of interdependence between the lightness and weight of being with a seemingly warm performance.

In this piece, Liang questions the environment and destiny that living creatures cannot choose themselves, considers the strong willpower that little creatures hold against to destiny, meditates the complex relationship between contradictory materials. The work features the philosophy of conquering the unyielding with the yielding by pouring Liang's ideas into a group of circular symbols and endless silk thread.



Chains: The Unbearable Lightness of Being/Nature Series No.79, 2003-2007

Hollow resin, iron powder, silk, cocoons

Installation size 350x550x200cm

3 rings 108x27x27cm (x 4 pieces)|4 rings 148x27x27cm (x 4 pieces)

5 rings 185x27x27cm (x 3 pieces), LSJU024_3



Planar Tunnel, 2013

Light casts a dim shadow from the silk on the wall, floating, and then leaks away. It seems to depict a tunnel expanding infinitely. The idea of this work comes from the silk garment excavated from King Ma's Mound (an archaeological site located in Changsha, China). The silk garment, as thin as cicada's wings, tells all the memories and history. Liang Shaoji started the experiment of this series in 2009. Pieces of circular silk are created upon Liang's acquaintance of the biological clock of silkworms, the span of their spinning activity and the regularity of how they pile silk up.



Planar Tunnel , 2013

Silk

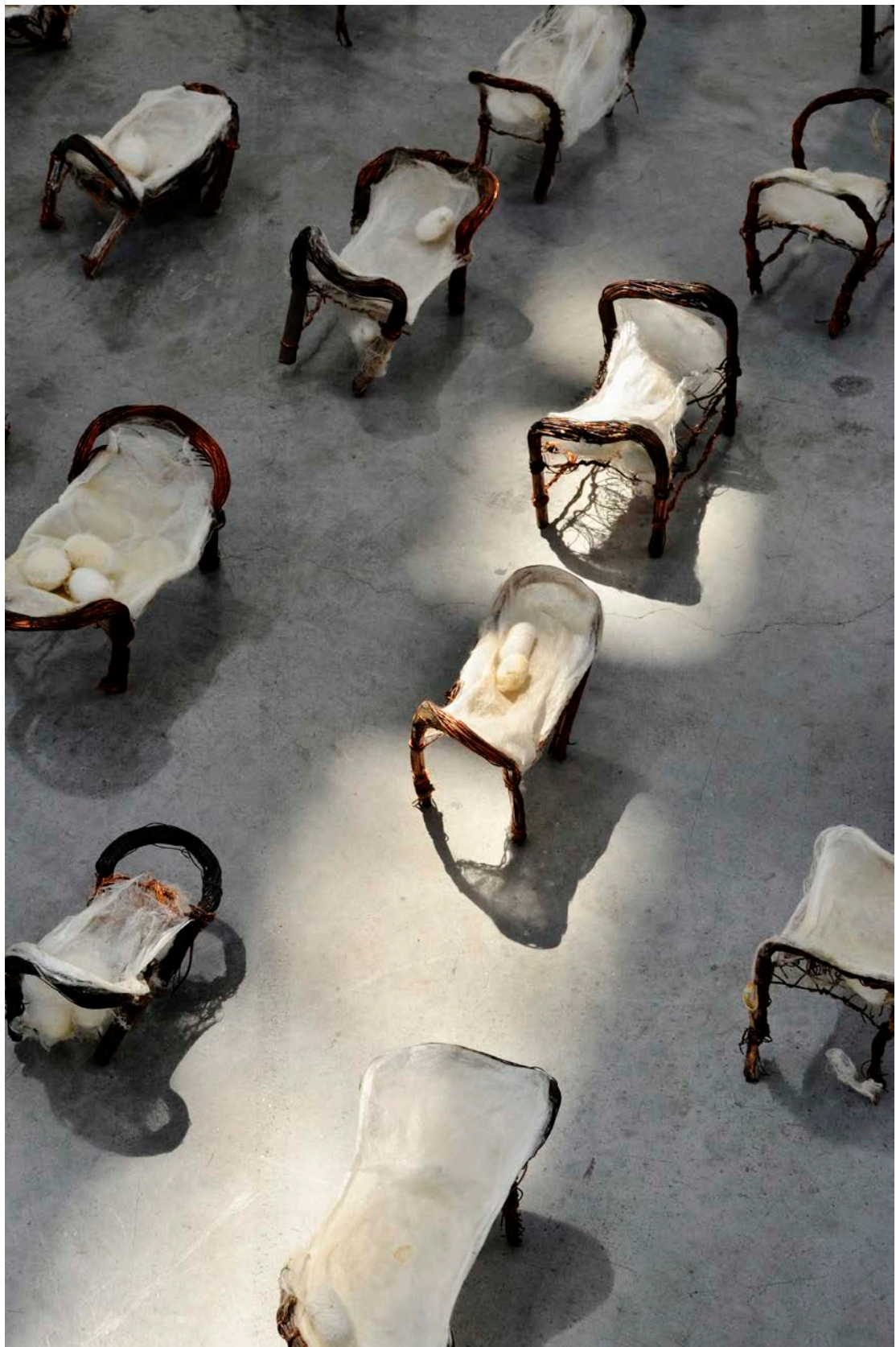
Diametre 120cm | in acrylic box 140*140*6cm, LSJ_7027

Beds/Nature Series No.10, 1993-1999

Every time when silkworms spin (the process usually lasts 3 to 6 days), Liang Shaoji has to be at their side and can only sleep for 3 hours everyday. Once again, he was lying on the ground to observe and conduct his practice as if he was a silkworm. But he was too tired and fell asleep. A silkworm fell between his neck and shirt collar. He did not find out that this little thing had already left a circular trace on him until he woke up an hour later. He then started to make his *Beds*.

It was once full of anxiety and worries in China in the 1990s. Portraying what he saw and felt in those years, Liang modeled these beds with the copper wire taken from burned engines and let silkworms live and spin on them. Those silkworms spent all their life on the beds, which is just like human beings, most of whom come to and leave this world on the beds, and spend at least 1/3 of their time on the bed for sleeping.

In 1992 Liang started to experiment how to let silkworms spin on cold and hard metal that they didn't like. He then worked on this series every year from 1993 to 1999.



Beds/Nature Series No.10, 1993-1999

Charred copper, silk, cocoons

17 pieces, smallest 6x9x6cm, biggest 12x18x11cm

Dimensions variable, LSJU018_1



Mounted/Nature Series No. 103, 2004-2007

Mounted/Nature Series No. 103 is a stack of newspaper covered with semi-transparent silk spun by silkworms sheet by sheet. It looks like a stack of mounted Chinese paintings and calligraphies with their sides flopping. Like the traditional Chinese mounting technique which helps to preserve paintings and calligraphies, the silk thread also preserves the newspaper and the news stays in memory. But covered with silk, the words and texts on newspaper are hard to recognise and read. All the information delivered through the newspaper, about violence, wars, celebrations, grief and so on, are thus soften.



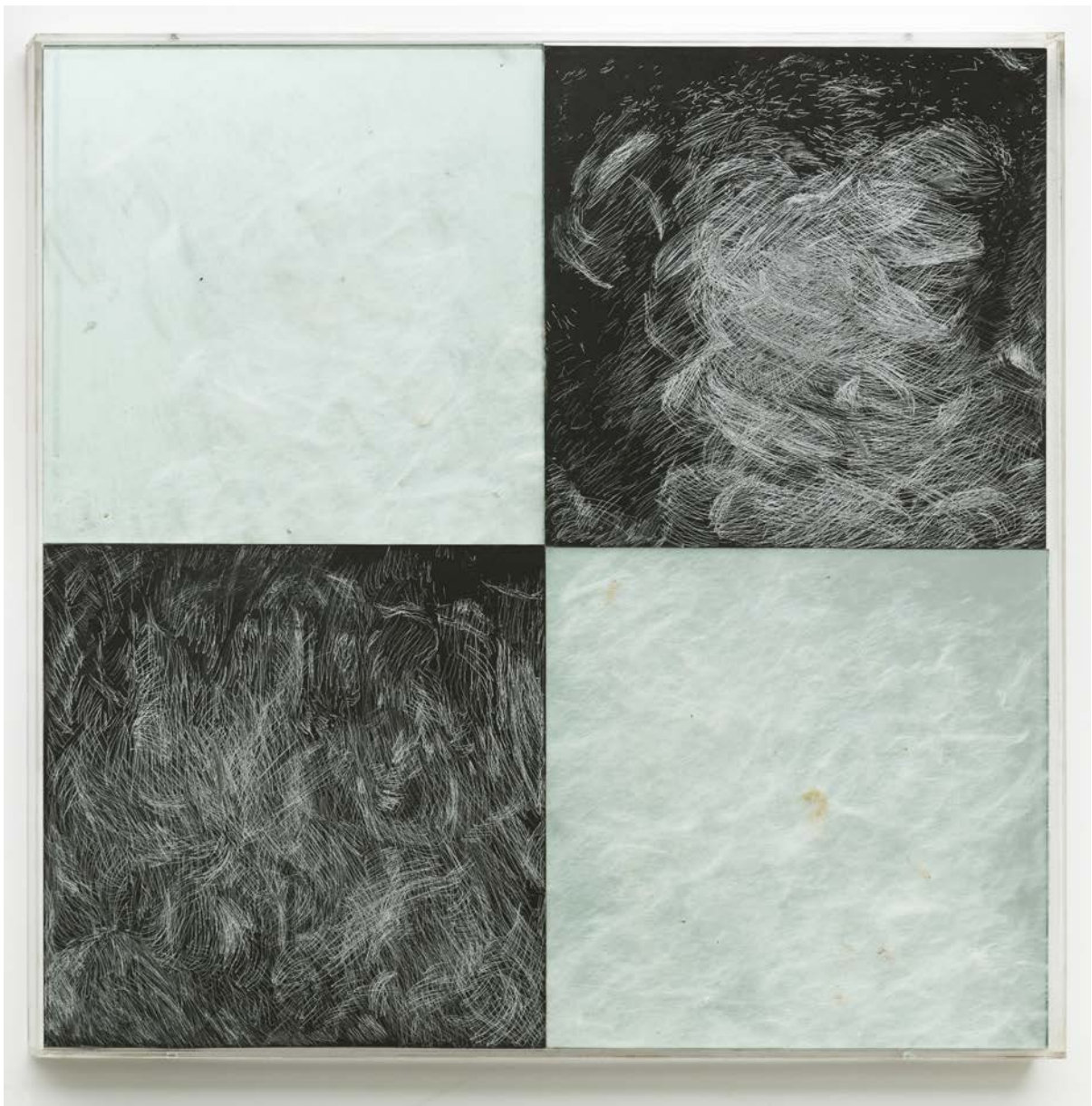
Mounted/Nature Series No. 103, 2004-2007
 Newspaper, silk, cocoons 58x88x66cm, LSJ_6254



Accompany, 2017

Liang Shaoji found out the secret of silkworm spinning through his 28-year experiment and practice: the trace left by silkworms actually consists of endless shapes of “8”, if take a look at silkworm’s spinning process at the slow motion. Seen as a code of life circle in the universe, the “8” emerges but also dispels the brushwork of abstract painting. It is movement with but also without an image.

Square is in strong contrast to the round movement of silk spinning. Here, the 4 equal-sized squares are specially arranged like chequered pattern: the man-made silver lines on the black cardstock imitate and re-present the natural movement of silk spinning on the mirrors.



Accompany, 2017

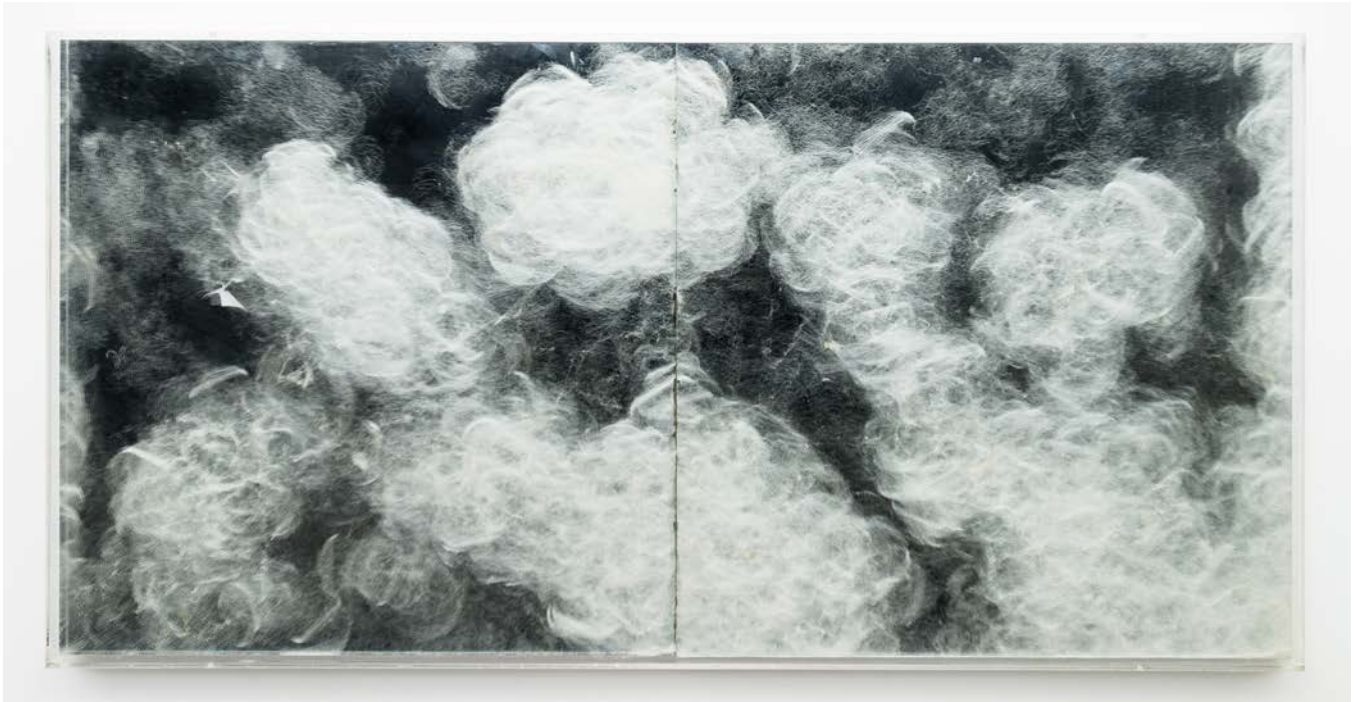
Silk, mirror, oil pen on paper
70x70cm | in acrylic box 72x72x6.5cm, LSJ_7919

Cloud Mirror, 2017

Liang Shaoji made his first mirror work in 1993. Actually it was a small piece of glass on which he put some silkworms to cover it with their threads. In 1995, he used a real mirror. The silk thread on the mirror looked like clouds. He afterwards made a photograph of silk-covered mirrors laying on the top of mountain and himself sitting and meditating aside. The drifting clouds crossing the blue sky reflected in the mirror overlap with the cloud-like silk thread on the mirrors.

Tiantai, a small county in Zhejiang Province where Liang now resides, is the home of Tiantai Buddhism, a school of Buddhism in China. Looking up at the foot of Mount Tiantai, his/her attention is overtaken by clouds and mountains. Liang senses the sacred and poetic nature of clouds, as well as their nobility and strength. For him, clouds symbolise the breathing of the nature, life and silkworms. "This is close to a Zen state of mind. It means to empty yourself of pain, sadness, competition and unrest; to separate yourself from the hubbub of urban strife in solitude and tranquility, free and elegant like the clouds. " (Liang)

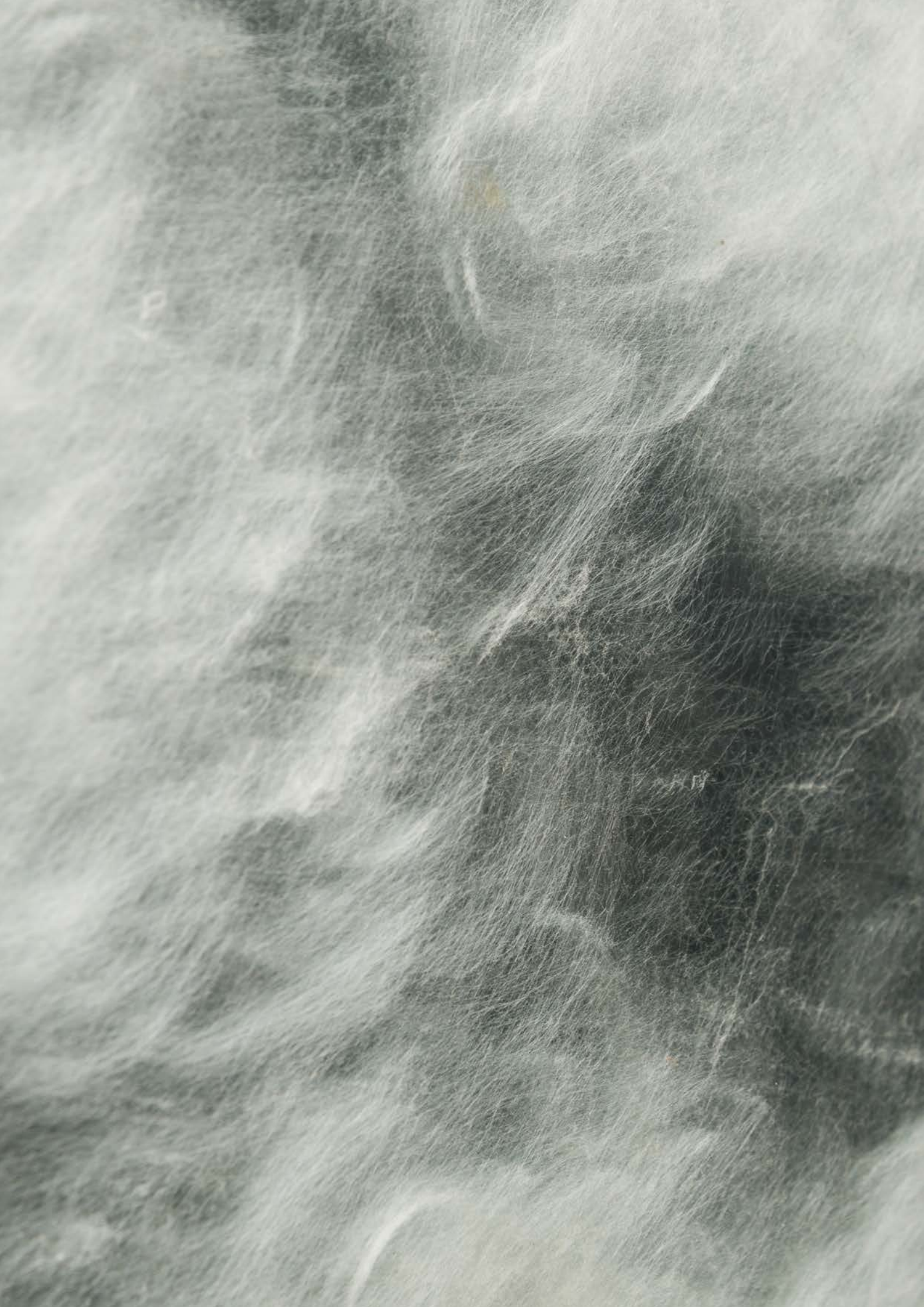
Cloud Mirror interprets "mirror image" in two ways. One is physical: mirrors create reflected duplication of clouds crossing the sky. The other is psychological: the idea of that the silk thread on the mirrors resemble drifting clouds comes from his/her imagination.



Cloud Mirror, 2017

Silk, mirror

60x120cm | in acrylic box 62x121x6.5cm, LSJ_8106



梁绍基

Liang Shaoji

b. 1945, now lives and works in Tiantai, Zhejiang

"Some say that the ultimate goal of art is for the artist to express their life experiences and emotions. Then what we see here is the life of a silkworm, first as an egg like a black dot, then as a tiny creature, feeble and writhing, and then as a white larva greedily nibbling away at mulberry leaves. What follows is a mysterious transformation: the silkworm gradually turns transparent and produces a pure silver thread. To the rhythm of its rocking head, it wraps itself into a cocoon or glosses the surface of any object it rests on. In the end, after "the silk is all spun," it leaves behind a black pupa. We can imagine the struggle, pain, and sublimation of a life in transformation that makes up the emotional and philosophical underpinnings of Liang's work." (Wu Hung)

"Truly believing in the spiritual and material power of an intimate merging and exchange between the work of nature and the human imagination—in Liang's case, an imagination profoundly rooted in Chinese culture and view of the cosmos—and turning this into contemporary forms of creation, he has endowed such a world with harmony, often considered as registered in the realm of the eternal, and rendered it freshly alive and firmly contemporary. His work is an enlightening remind of something crucially significant in our lives, our relation with nature, something that has been too often overlooked and excluded in the dominant system's cult of a one-dimensional modernity." "Unlike conventional scientific experiments, Liang's work, through various artistic processes driven by imagination and poetry, has been turned into the embodiment of the ontological significance of life. It is about true meaning of living in the world: constant negotiations and struggles between life and death, endurance and fate, pleasure and pain..." (Hou Hanru)

"But even while referring to Chinese tradition and associative philosophy, Liang targets the here and now, transforming those well-known references into thoroughly contemporary installations and performances." "Demanding unusual expertise and extraordinary techniques, his works are slow in the making and difficult to interpret. His installations don't easily submit to commodification—they should be treated as the residue of actions and thought processes, indeed, as markers of a chosen path of life, rather than mere objects." (Marianne Brouwer)

ShanghART

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